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US INTO OUR BATTLE, WE
CANNOT FAIL TO BE
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IN THE SHADOW THEY WERE
COMFORTED TO KNOW
THAT THE GREAT FRIEND
HAD THEM BY THE HAND

THE WAY OF PRAYER

THE WAY OF PRAYER

BY

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IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE great fact of the Old Testament is the fact of God. Amid all life's uncertainties He was to the devout Hebrew the supreme certainty, the great Person with whom one had always to reckon. His presence might be radiantly manifested in the material blessings of this life — in the grain, the wine, and the oil, in peace and prosperity, and other such things dear to the ancient Hebrew heart; or He might seem to stand afar off and hide His face. But always He was felt to be somewhere; happiness lay in being near Him, and His friendship was the most precious thing in the world.

Thus nothing could be more natural to the Hebrew than prayer. God was the great Friend, and men spoke to Him as readily and as naturally as they spoke to their earthly friends. He could listen like an earthly friend; He could answer, too, and help, as no human friend could do, just because He was God and not man. There is something very beautiful and touching about the speech of men to God in the Old Testament. In the later books

it tends to become more set and solemn, as did the religion generally; but more or less, from the beginning to the end, there is about it a quaint and charming simplicity, which is only possible to men who have the heart and the faith of a little child. What could be more attractive, for example, than the prayer of Abraham's servant, when he has at last reached the far country, where he hopes to find a wife for his master's son? "Behold, I am standing by the fountain of water: and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, 'Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink'; and she shall say, 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also,' let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master" (Gen. xxiv. 13, 14). This naïve fixing of the sign by which the maiden is to be recognized was no doubt more possible to an ancient man, with his simpler view of the world, than it would be to us; but through it gleams a fine faith in the Providence that governs human life. When, in the sequel, Rebekah appears on the scene, and does all that the servant had prayed that the maid of destiny should

do, he "looked stedfastly on her"—what a world of significance is concentrated in that look!—"holding his peace, to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not." And now that he has the indubitable assurance that his journey has been indeed divinely led, he does not forget to thank the great Lord and Guide of human life. "The man bowed his head and worshipped the Lord, and said: 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who hath not forsaken his lovingkindness and his truth toward my master. As for me, the Lord hath led me in the way to the house of my master's brethren.'"

That is an early story; but the same simple faith is illustrated, centuries after, by a prayer of Ezra, offered when he and his company were on the point of starting for Palestine. He informs us that he had already told the Persian king that the God of the Hebrews protected those who trusted Him; and so, he tells us, he "was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way." It is surely a very practical faith which refuses a military escort over a long and dangerous road. In simple faith the little company therefore committed themselves to God "to seek of him a straight way for us, and for our

little ones, and for all our substance." And their faith was rewarded: for "he was entreated of us," "and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the lier-in-wait by the way" (Ezra viii. 21, 23, 31).

Equally significant of the place and power of prayer in the life of a devout Hebrew is the incident which Nehemiah, Ezra's contemporary, recounts of his appearance before the Persian king, in order to crave permission to return to his native land and restore her fallen fortunes. The king asked him to name his request. It is a moment of peculiar tension; it is of the gravest importance that Nehemiah say the right thing. "*So I prayed to the God of Heaven.* And I said to the king, 'If it please the king,'" etc. (Neh. ii. 4, 5). He steadies his soul by a swift and silent prayer, which is a most eloquent witness to the quality of his inner life. And he, like Ezra, has his reward: "The king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." Nehemiah was a man of action and enterprise, but this incident is only one of many which show that all his work was done in an atmosphere of prayer and piety. When, for example, provoked by the rapid progress which, under Nehemiah's direction, was being made in the rebuild-

ing of the walls of Jerusalem, the enemies of the Jews were planning an assault upon the city, "We made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night" (iv. 9). And again he bids the men whom he has organized for the defence of the city, "remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight" (iv. 14).

These last two illustrations are characteristic of the best Hebrew piety, to which work was felt to be no less indispensable than prayer. The men who prayed also knew how to watch and fight. There is always a healthy contact with reality, a keen sense of responsibility, and prayer is never made an excuse for inactivity. The great men of action in Hebrew history are usually also men of prayer. Moses was the great leader in the events which launched the Hebrew people upon their wonderful career; and again and again he appears in the narrative praying — significantly enough, usually for his guilty or stricken people. David, man of enterprise and battles as he was, was also a man of prayer. In the nature of the case, little is said about this in the books of Samuel, but much may be inferred from the simple statements that, in an hour of peril, "David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God" (1 Sam. xxx, 6); and,

in the dark days of Absalom's rebellion, he humbly yet hopefully committed his case to God (2 Sam. xvi. 12).

The passion with which the ancient Hebrew could address God receives its supreme illustration in Job and Jeremiah. Religion, with its agonies of struggle and of hope, is perhaps more intensely expressed in these men than in any other men of the Old Testament; and it is no accident that it is just the prayers of these men that reach heights of almost incredible audacity. Job (xxi.) vehemently challenges the whole moral order of the world, and passionately demands an audience with God. Jeremiah (xx. 7) charges God with beguiling him — him who was but a child — into his awful prophetic mission, in which his fate was to become a laughing-stock all the day. But such wild utterances only show how real God was to these men, how fearfully their faith had been perplexed by their experiences, and how passionately they longed to behold God as their Vindicator and their Friend. They spoke as they did because to them God was everything. They had nothing else in the world and they must be sure of Him; and very precious must have been the moments when such men found Him again, and knew Him to be in truth their "refuge in the day of evil" (Jer. xvii. 17).

Prayers of every kind are represented in the Old Testament — petition, intercession, confession, thanksgiving. The outlook of the prayers, as of the Old Testament religion generally, is for the most part confined to this world. The earth on which they lived and moved was the Lord's, and here, if anywhere, they must find Him. What religion suffered by having her gaze thus practically withdrawn from the future world, she gained by having to concentrate it all the more powerfully upon the symbols of God's presence and goodness in this. Hence the predominance of prayers and aspirations in the Old Testament for earthly things — for food and drink and raiment, for the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth, for crops and cattle, for corn and wine, for riches, honor, and long life, for peace, population, and prosperity, for victory and national glory, for deliverance from danger, sickness, and death. It would be easy to do less than justice to these seemingly materialistic aspirations. They come from the heart, not of materialists, but of profoundly religious men who saw in these things the gifts of their God, the shining symbols of His grace, and who therefore looked beyond the gifts to the Giver; or if they failed to do this, it was not for want of many a warning. But

apart from this, there were prayers, as the religion developed, for other and higher things, for wisdom and understanding, for a clean heart and a right spirit, for deliverance from every crooked way and divine guidance in the way everlasting; and so completely had some of the later Hebrews shaken themselves free from the materialism which had clung to the earlier religion that they gladly express their joy in God even when fig-tree and vine, flock and field, and all the customary tokens of the divine presence and blessing are withdrawn (Hab. iii. 17, 18).

It is curious and significant that most of the intercessory prayers alluded to in the Old Testament are offered by prophets. We think of these men chiefly as preachers, proclaiming the divine demands with mighty and insistent voice; but there is not a little to show, as indeed we might have guessed, that they were also men of prayer, who habitually pled before God for their sinful people. Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah were all intercessors, and what is true of them was no doubt true of all. Jeremiah tells us himself how he stood before God to speak good for the people and to turn away the divine wrath from them (xviii. 20); and to Moses is ascribed the sublime prayer, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin,

and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exod. xxxii. 31, 32). The prophets seem to have charged themselves with the duty of intercession (cf. 1 Sam. vii. 5, xii. 23); they had pled with God for the people before they appeared to plead with the people for God.

The sense of sin was deeply developed in Israel by the experience of exile; and partly on this account, no doubt, confessions of sin are much more elaborate and prominent in the later literature than in the earlier. The earnestness with which it was confessed, at least on one historic occasion, is attested by an interesting passage in Ezra: "I rent my garment and my robe, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down confounded. . . . And at the evening oblation I arose up from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe rent; and I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and I said, 'O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our guiltiness is grown up unto the heavens'" (ix. 3–6).

The Hebrews worshipped a God who

had often done great things for them, whereof they were glad, and many a time, both as a nation and as individuals, they must have offered to Him prayers and songs of thanksgiving. Many such songs are in the Psalter — for individual deliverance from sickness and danger, for national deliverance from exile and war. How integral a part of religion thanksgiving was felt to be, is well illustrated in the description of Daniel, who is said to have "kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and *given thanks* before his God" (vi. 10). It is also curious that the only prayer that is formally prescribed in the Old Testament is a prayer of thanksgiving to be offered by the worshipper after he has set down his basket of first-fruits before the altar (Deut. xxvi. 1–10). Nowhere is the humility of true gratitude expressed with more exquisite simplicity than in the prayer of Jacob: "I am not worthy of the least of all the love and of all the faithfulness, which thou hast showed unto thy servant" (Gen. xxxii. 10).

The men whose prayers speak to us from the pages of the Old Testament were men who were familiar with all the checkered experiences of life; they knew its gladness and its pain, they had been surprised and tempted and tried, like as we. They knew what was in man;

that is why their words so come home to our hearts, and why even today we can make them our own. The valley through which they passed was often one of deepest shadow, but they were comforted to know that the great Friend had them by the hand. To them sorrow was real, but God was no less real; His mercy and His love were as palpable as the mountains and the great sea. He was like a father who pities his little children, and hears them when they cry; only infinitely greater than any human father, for He was the Maker of heaven and earth, and His years know no end. His tender mercies were felt to be over all His works, and well might men commit their lives to Him with quietness and confidence, and say to Him out of a full heart, "My times are in thy hand." "Thou art my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust."

Sometimes indeed this peace came only after a long, fierce struggle. Often it was only after the feet had slipped on the cruel, weary way, that there came the assurance that God was ever with His faithful servants, holding them by the right hand (Ps. lxxiii. 2, 23). But the prayers of such men are immortal, because they have grasped the eternal realities. Amid all sorrow and pain, amid all confusion and change, they still believe in

the merciful and unchanging God, and out of the depths they can lift up their sorrowful faces to Him with the believing prayer:

"Unto thee do I lift up mine eyes,
O thou that sittest in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maid unto the hand of her mistress;
So our eyes look unto the Lord our God,
Until he have mercy upon us."

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

IF God is the great fact of the Old Testament, Christ is no less the great fact of the New. Not, of course, that He has displaced God — that could never be; but He revealed Him — revealed Him so completely that He and the Father, though distinct, were felt to be one. What God is to the writers of the New Testament, He is through Christ. The only communion with God possible—for them at least — is through Him. Christians are described by Peter as men "who *through Christ* are believers in God." In the Old Testament men approached and addressed God directly; in the New their communion is mediated through Christ. The New Testament is pervaded by a sense not only of the supremacy but of the indispensableness of Jesus. In Jesus all things had become new — not only the world, but even God Himself. Their previous apprehension of God, in comparison with their apprehension of Him in Jesus, was, in a sense, but as rumor to vision.

> I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;
> But now — in Jesus — mine eye seeth thee.

Prayer is even offered in the New Testa-

ment, though rarely, to Jesus. Stephen dies his martyr death with a prayer to the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit; and the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus," must often have risen from the torn but expectant hearts of the early Christians.

So stupendous is the place occupied by the risen Lord in their imagination and experience that the resources of language are exhausted to describe it. His is the name that is above every name. He is far above all rule and authority, not only in this world, but in that which is to come. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, and in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the one through whom all things are, who sits at God's right hand in the heavenly places, the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance, upholding all things by the word of His power, the author of eternal salvation, the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, the prince of life, the lord of glory, the giver of grace and peace.

Considering, then, the sublime place accorded to Jesus by the faith of the early church, it becomes a matter of exceptional interest to ascertain how He prayed and what He taught about prayer in the days of His flesh. Like all His

other words, His prayers were arresting. We are seldom indeed permitted to look into the intimacy of that lonely communion with His Father; but the few glimpses that we get justify us in believing that He who spake as never man spake, also prayed as never man prayed. Of one great occasion we are told that, "*as he was praying*, the fashion of his countenance was altered." He prayed with transfigured face. How that face must have looked as the Master stood before the great, expectant multitudes sitting on the grass, and prayed, "looking up to heaven," for the Father's blessing on the five loaves and the two fishes! It is surely no surprise that the disciples should be anxious to learn the Master's secret, and that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of them said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray."

In two parables — the parable of the friend who came at midnight, and the parable of the unjust judge — Jesus taught the duty of persistency in prayer. He who is in earnest will ask, seek, knock, and keep knocking, till the door is opened. Never was there earnestness like his. Whether or not the statement, omitted in many of the manuscripts, is literally true, as it well may be, that in the agony of His prayer in Gethsemane, "his sweat

became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground," it is certainly true to the spirit of the situation, and is practically corroborated by the statement in the epistle to the Hebrews that "he offered up prayer and supplication with strong crying and tears." Doubtless there was never before in the prayers of Jesus the agony of that terrible hour, but there was always the same earnestness. Whole nights, when other men were sleeping, He spent in communion with His Father. After He had healed many that were sick with divers diseases, for example, we are told that, "a great while before day he rose up and went out and departed into a desert place and there prayed." The work of the day could only be done in the strength that came from the silence and communion of the night.

The dying prayer of Jesus, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," must have been the prayer of all His life. As it happens, however, the recorded prayers or allusions to prayer in the life of Jesus are nearly all connected with crises in His mission. In the supreme and solemn moments which came to Him, as they come to all of us, when a grave step has to be taken or a great peril faced, He sought with peculiar earnestness the

fellowship of His Father. At the baptism, for example. With that, in a sense, His public career began; and so, says Luke, "when all the people were baptized, Jesus also having been baptized, *and praying*, the Holy Spirit descended upon him." So again with His choice of the Twelve. Humanly speaking, the whole future of the kingdom of God — we might indeed say, of the world — depended upon the men He would select to perpetuate His work; so "he went out into the mountain to pray, and continued *all night* in prayer to God." So again with Peter's confession of Him as the Messiah. This was a moment of royal importance in the history of the Twelve, and Jesus selected it only after communing with His Father in heaven. "As he was praying apart, the disciples were with him; and he asked them, saying, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?'" Then follows the great confession. So it was, apparently, with all His miraculous acts of healing. It was only by prayer that devils could be cast out; only after "looking up to heaven" that He Himself would speak the emancipating word to the man who had been deaf and dumb. So it was in Gethsemane, when He fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him, but that the will

of God be done. So it was on the cross, when, with His parting breath, He commended His spirit into His Father's hands.

We see thus the mighty place occupied by prayer in the life of Jesus. What was the spirit of His prayer? All the different kinds of prayer offered by other men are offered by Jesus — all except confession. He confesses nothing because He has nothing to confess. But He thanks His Father, He prays for Himself, He intercedes for others. The note of thanksgiving which runs through the book of Revelation and the epistles of Paul was caught from the Master. The words "I thank thee, Father," were frequently upon His lips. He gave thanks for the bread that perisheth; He gave thanks for the mystery of the divine will, which revealed itself to the simple-hearted. And what an intercessor Jesus must have been! He knew the frailty of our frame and remembered that we are dust, and he poured forth His great pitiful heart in pleadings, not only for waverers, like Peter, but even for the cruel men who nailed Him to His cross. When He prayed for Himself, we may be sure it was chiefly that the will of God might be fulfilled in Him. He did not indeed exclude material things from the scope of His prayer. He had taught His disciples to pray for their

daily bread, and He Himself prayed that His cup of agony might pass from Him. But behind every specific petition was the desire that the divine will be done. "Take away this cup: yet not my will, but thine."

The prayer we know as the Lord's prayer, though it is the disciples' prayer rather than the Lord's, mirrors better than anything else the mind of the Master upon prayer. It is so familiar to us that few of us know how wonderful it is. But for brevity and range, simplicity and depth, there is nothing like it in all the world. Its very first words carry us from our little selfish interests to the great universe where God has His home — the almighty God, yet the kind *Father*, my Father indeed, yet just because He is mine, the Father of other men as well, *our* Father. The simple words usher us into a goodly fellowship — fellowship with a God whom we can love as well as worship, fellowship too with a great multitude of brethren who depend, like ourselves, upon the good Father. *Hallowed be the name* of such a Father-God; His name, His character, all that concerns Him must be thought of and spoken of worthily, so that reverence shall flourish and irreverence forever disappear. *His kingdom come* — that kingdom whose coming meant righteousness, peace, and

joy for all the world. And in all things *His will*, not ours, *be done* — done swiftly and gladly as by the angels in heaven. From the wide prospect of the kingdom and the will of God, the prayer passes to the needs and frailties of men, the need of bread, the need of forgiveness, the need of being kept. It is refreshing to remember that our Lord so deliberately recognized the material basis of human life as He does in the petition for bread. There is no strained or unnatural idealism in the teaching of Jesus. Man does not live by bread alone, but neither can He live without it, and the prayer for it, and for other material things which are helpful or necessary in our efforts to fulfil the will of God, is thoroughly legitimate and Christian. *Give us bread* — not luxury, but sufficiency, bread for the day — a prayer which encourages in us a sense of daily dependence upon God. But we need forgiveness as well as bread. We have sinned against the good Father, and there can be no true life until we are at peace with Him, and the prayer reminds us that forgiveness is only possible to the man who is willing to forgive: the unforgiving remain unforgiven. We need to be forgiven for the past, and for the future we need to be kept from the temptations into which we are too easily led by

the evil without and within. *Forgive us, deliver us:* in these simple cries our past and our future, with their sin and frailty, are gathered up and humbly committed to the pity and the power of the great Father in heaven. Then, when men are redeemed and set free from evil to do good, in some measure at least the Kingdom comes and the Will is done.

Paul was the Master's greatest disciple, and in his sense of the urgency of prayer the disciple reflects the Master. Incidentally he tells us that he prayed ceaselessly, night and day exceedingly, and he charges his converts to do the same. As with Jesus, so with Paul the note of thanksgiving was very conspicuous. In everything prayer and supplication was to be blended with thanksgiving, as he told his Philippian friends. His exhortation to give thanks to God always for all things is but a reflex of the abounding gratitude of his own spirit. For all things — but most of all for Christ. Paul's heart leaps as he thinks of the victory which Christ had won over sin and death and of all the spiritual blessings which are shared by those who love him. Thanks be unto God, he rapturously cries, for His unspeakable gift! How wonderful Paul's thanksgiving was, and how deeply it

puts most of us to shame, we can only fully realize when we remember the fierce, hard life he was compelled to lead for the gospel's sake, face to face repeatedly with danger and death. "Five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Yet this is the man who rejoices evermore, conqueror and more than conqueror, because he is conscious of possessing the unspeakable gift. How real, how near, how dear must Christ have been to him, to have lifted him so easily and triumphantly over afflictions so manifold!

In intercession, too, Paul is as great as in thanksgiving. He longed and prayed to God for the salvation of his brethren the Jews. Especially dear to his heart was the spiritual welfare of his converts. His "anxiety for all the churches" which he had founded expressed itself in intercessory prayer for their members, that

the Lord might direct their hearts into the love of God and the patience of Christ, and give them peace at all times. He interceded for men so earnestly because he loved them so deeply. "God is my witness," he solemnly assures his beloved Philippians, "how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus"; and still more simply and touchingly, "I have you in my heart." To Paul's prayers for himself, no tinge of self-seeking attaches. When he prays for himself, it is only that he may become a fitter instrument and win a wider opportunity. His prayer for the removal of the thorn in the flesh was no doubt dictated rather by his anxiety for the welfare of the gospel than by any longing for personal ease or comfort. No doubt he regarded his physical disability, whatever it was, as an impediment to his evangelistic work; without it, his gospel might have run a freer and speedier course. But, though the thorn is not removed, Paul can still rejoice, for through his infirmity he learns a deeper experience of the grace and power of Christ, and that is sufficient. By carrying the gospel triumphantly throughout the world, he did perhaps the mightiest work for God that mortal man has ever done, and there surely is proof abundant that in his weakness he was indeed

strengthened by Another and a Stronger than himself.

Considering the glorious place of Christ in the faith and experience of the early church, is it any wonder that they blend His praises with the praises of God Himself, saying with a loud voice, "Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing and the honor and the glory and the dominion, for ever and ever"?

IN THE WORLD OF TODAY

IT is something to know how the ancient Hebrews prayed. God was their great Friend, and their simple, earnest speech to Him still serves us for a model and an inspiration. But our intellectual world is very different from theirs. We feel problems keenly where they felt none. Our wider and more accurate knowledge of the world in which we live and move has impressed upon many minds a sense of the uniformity of nature and the seeming inexorableness of law, which has given the whole question of prayer a new and perplexing aspect that the ancient Hebrew would not have been able to appreciate at all. He believed in a living God, but with him this was no empty phrase; it denoted a God who could show that He was alive by doing within the physical world anything He pleased. He had created it. He still controlled it, and He could use it for His own ends. With God all things were possible, nothing was too hard for Him.

We are also impressed, as the Hebrew could hardly have been, by speculative

difficulties arising out of the nature of God Himself. God is unchangeable, we say, the same yesterday, today, and forever; and what is the use of praying to such a One? Can the most earnest prayer that ever was offered change the Unchangeable? Will the great order established by Him not move inexorably on, deaf to all human entreaty? Or again, we say that God is omniscient. He knows what is in our hearts, He knows what we have need of far better than we do ourselves; and if He already knows, what is the use of our telling Him? Or again we may say that He is wise and good. He not only knows our needs, but He knows how to meet them; and not only does He know how to meet them, but He desires to meet them. His will is a gracious and loving will, more eager even to help us than we are to be helped. He does not begin to care for men only when they begin to pray to Him; and if He wills their good, can we suppose that He wills it the less for their silence? Many are the voices that rise in our hearts, and many are the impressions borne in upon us from the scientific temper of our time, all calculated to shake our faith in the value of prayer and to destroy it as a practice. Yet prayer remains, an irrepressible instinct, dormant often, it may be, when

life runs smoothly, but asserting itself sometimes in passionate and anguished ways, when the road grows rough and dark.

But what is prayer? What do we seek and what do we expect to accomplish, when we pray? Prayer has been defined as an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will; but in its essence it is not so much the expression of our desire for *things* at all as of our desire for God Himself.

"The whole world wide delights me not,
For heaven and earth, Lord, care I not,
If I may have but thee."

These words may seem to most of us to be pitched upon too lofty a level. Average men, with no particular interest in religion, do find a genuine delight in this world and the things thereof; they do care for health and strength and opportunity and success. But the deeply religious man values these things as gifts of God, or as avenues to Him, or as opportunities for the completer service of Him; he could be content with Him apart from them, but not with them apart from Him. This does not mean that we are not to pray for specific things; our Lord prayed to be saved from the hour of His agony, and Paul that the thorn should torment his flesh no more. But it does mean that

our deepest and supreme desire should be that not our will, but God's, be done.

The Father knows what things we have need of, but we do not completely know; how often have we had to thank Him, it may be after many years, for denying us the thing for which we had appealed to Him with strong crying and tears! In the light of our infinite and pathetic ignorance it would sometimes seem as if specific petitions were hardly worth while, and the only prayer worth praying were "Thy will be done." This, as we have seen, is not the true attitude. "Let your requests be made known unto God," Paul said to the Philippians — but every such request should be begun, continued, and ended in the request that the will of God be done. The opening petitions of the Lord's Prayer are an everlasting reminder that the overshadowing thought of all life and of all prayer should be the coming of the divine kingdom and the doing of the divine will. Our Lord prayed, "Save me from this hour"; but deeper even than His desire to be saved was His desire that the Father's will should be done, and His name glorified. "Father, glorify thy name."

True prayer is not an attempt to determine the will of God, but the desire to be at one with it. We cannot suppose

that God, for our much or earnest speaking, will be coerced into granting what He would otherwise be unwilling to grant. It is if we ask anything "according to his will" that He heareth us. Nothing, we may be sure, will be done against that will; it is therefore for us patiently and humbly to decipher it, to be alert for intimations of it, and to be gratefully submissive to it when it has declared itself. Too often, in the bottom of our hearts, is the desire that our will be triumphant; not "Thy will," if it be hard, but mine be done. For our request, perhaps for the success of a business venture, perhaps for the recovery of a friend who is sick unto death, seems so natural and reasonable. But we pray, when we pray truly, not that we may conquer God, but that He may conquer us, and that our wills may be found not only submissive but rejoicing, in harmony with His. Our Lord prayed, "*If it be possible*, let this cup pass away from me." He respected the limits set by the will of God, and every one who would pray reverently must do the same.

Even to the purest and most devoted souls, that will may for a time remain obscure and inscrutable. Paul prayed, not once, nor twice, but thrice, for the removal of the thorn; and Jesus offered up prayers

and supplications with crying and tears that the terrible cup might pass from Him. In the strict sense, neither of these prayers was answered. The cup had to be drained to the dregs — "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" — and the flesh continued to be tormented by the thorn. Yet in the deepest sense these prayers were both answered. Overshadowing the prayer for the removal of the cup and the thorn was the prayer that the will of God be done, and that prayer was abundantly answered. By each of the sufferers that will was accepted, and in it they found strength and peace. Paul learned a more abundant experience of the divine grace through the strength which he felt to possess him even in his weakness, so that the very rejection of his prayer became to him a gracious and brilliant answer. So it was with our Lord. He *was* heard, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us. The cup was not removed, but strength was given Him to drink it. From His knees He rose victorious; and in the strength that came upon Him after the agony of His prayer in the garden, He stepped quietly forth to face treachery and death.

> " Into the woods my Master went,
> Clean forspent, forspent.
> Into the woods my Master came,
> Forspent with love and shame.

"Out of the woods my Master went,
And He was well content.
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with love and shame."

No earnest prayer is ever offered in vain. Prayer brings us into the presence of God, and the strength and peace of God come back upon us. It is undeniable that remarkable outward results have been achieved by men of earnest prayer. Orphanages have been built and maintained, thousands of children supported and educated by means of resources which those who conducted these enterprises regarded beyond the shadow of a doubt as sent in answer to believing prayer. Possibly most of us have too timid and limited a conception of the potentialities of prayer in relation to the external world. Sir Oliver Lodge has said, for example, that "even in medicine, it is not really absurd to suggest that drugs and no prayer may be almost as foolish as prayer and no drugs." A fascinating field for study is just beginning here to disclose itself. But whatever the possible effects of prayer may be upon the world without, there can be no manner of doubt of its effect upon the man himself. It steadies him by ushering him into the strong and quiet presence of God. It searches him by bringing him face to face not only with his God, but also with

himself. The quiet light of eternity falls upon his life, and in that light he learns to distinguish the things that matter. His mind is cleared of false ambitions, his fickleness stands rebuked and abashed, his whole inner nature is braced and purified. He has spoken to his great Friend, and now peace and strength are his.

Over and over again has it been seen how the man who fortifies himself by prayer can face peril or perplexity with quietness and confidence, and how sometimes his confidence infects even those about him with a like serenity. Probably every man who knows anything of sincere prayer knows its power to soothe and banish fear. "In nothing be anxious," says Paul, "but let your requests be made known unto God"; and the inevitable result will be that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall stand sentry over your hearts and your thoughts." Nehemiah, as we have seen, experienced something of this steadying and strengthening power of prayer in that critical moment when he stood before the Persian king and was asked to name his request. After a brief and silent prayer to the God of heaven he found courage to go on (Neh. ii. 4). So it was, too, with Paul. When all those dreary

days and nights his ship was tossing upon the sea, when soldiers and sailors were losing their heads, and death seemed imminent, he it was who retained his calmness and courage, and he it was, the man of prayer, who spoke the steadying words which turned confusion into order, and reassured the whole company. "He gave thanks to God in the presence of all and *then were they all of good cheer.*" The prayer of such a man falls like a benediction upon the ear; the very sight of him, with that great, quiet strength of his, is an inspiration.

And prayer can steady in temptation as surely as in danger. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If we ask Him to go with us into our battle, we cannot fail to be victorious. Prayer reenforces the higher nature, unlovely things slink away in that atmosphere, whatever is base in us retreats ashamed and defeated in the white light of God's presence. As some one has said, either the prayer will kill the sin or the sin the prayer; but if the prayer be sincere, then the sin must die. Temptation may assail us on the side of our better nature as well as of our worse — in moments of passion, but also in moments of exaltation and in places of high opportunity and trust; but in both cases alike our refuge and

defense is in prayer. It protects us from conceit and pride and foolish ambition no less than from solicitations to the grosser sins, and it is just as necessary in the one case as in the other. Principal George Adam Smith tells of climbing one of the Alpine peaks, when, near the summit, "exhilarated by the thought of the great view awaiting me, but forgetful of the high gale that was blowing on the other side of the rocks, I sprang eagerly up them, and stood erect to see the view. The guide pulled me down — 'On your knees, Sir; you are not safe there except on your knees.'"

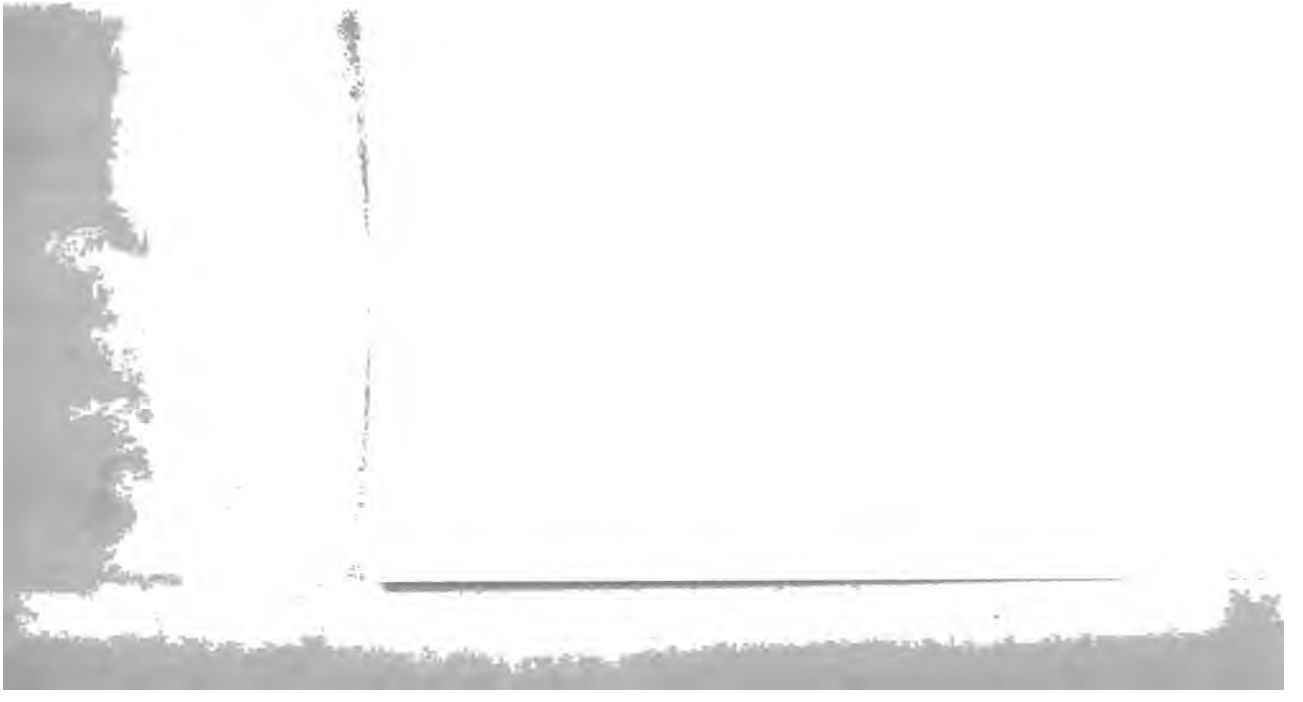
It is very characteristic of the level upon which our religious life is pitched that, when we speak of prayer, we think primarily and almost exclusively of petition. The note of thanksgiving is far too seldom struck, and even then seldom with the passion which inspires our prayers of entreaty. Here we have much to learn from the Bible with its many calls to "give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever"; and especially from the New Testament, which rejoices evermore in presence of the unspeakable Gift. We should learn to cultivate the open eye for that goodness of God which daily descends upon the world and which has filled our own past

years. We are ungrateful because we do not look upon the wonder of the world in which we live, or of the way by which we have been led. "*With thanksgiving*," says Paul, "let your requests be made known unto God." With what clear and grateful eyes did the Hebrews look upon the world, which to them was resplendent with the love of God!

"Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heav'ns;
Thy truth doth reach the clouds;
Thy justice is like mountains great;
Thy judgments deep as floods.
Lord, thou preservest man and beast,
How precious is thy grace!
Therefore in shadow of thy wings
Men's sons their trust shall place."

There are people not a few who are as graceless in their relations to God as to the men who do them a favor — people to whom it never occurs to say, "Thank you." But true religion is happy and grateful. Men whose hearts are moved as they should be by the goodness of God enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise; when they come before His presence, whether in the crowded sanctuary or in the quiet inner chamber, it is with joy. It is worth our while to cultivate the temper of gratitude, and to this end frequently and definitely to review our days and discover what cause they have brought us for thanks-

giving. Then, slowly, it may be, but surely, we shall learn to give thanks, not only for sunshine and joy and friendship and love, but "always for all things," — even for defeat and disappointment and sorrow. We shall learn, not only when the Lord hath given but also when the Lord hath taken away, to say, "The name of the Lord be blessed."



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